



**Dear Kalispell Planning Board,**

Re: The Flathead Warming Center

889 North Meridian Road is the responsible location for the Flathead Warming Center

Please allow me the opportunity to describe why this is the **right time**, the **right location**, and the **right organization** for your vote of confidence.

### **The Right Time**

The need is real. Our community does not have enough emergency shelter beds. With all shelter beds full, on the night of January 31, 2020, the national Point in Time data tells us that 79 individuals in our community slept outside or in a place not meant for human habitation. Last winter, the Flathead Warming Center turned individuals away approximately 168 times because more individuals were needing shelter than the facility could accommodate. 86 times individuals slept in the KPD Lobby. This option was problematic and now with the COVID-19 precautions, the lobby can no longer be open for those seeking refuge from the cold. With the passing of motor vehicle lodging as a civil infraction, individuals and families should not be sleeping in their vehicles.

Bringing individuals and families inside makes everyone safer and our community cleaner! Your decision to allow 889 North Meridian to be the home of the Flathead Warming Center, enables us to be a longterm solution to low barrier emergency shelter needs in our community. Your decision is the right time for the community as a whole.

### **The Right Location**

The property located at 889 North Meridian Rd. is a great location for the Flathead Warming Center. The building is surrounded primarily by businesses. When services, such as homeless shelters, are placed on the outskirts of town, the often unintended consequence is the marginalization of the most vulnerable populations in the community. However, this centralized location is accessible to all. The location is close to services (Gateway Community Center / United Way, Office of Public Assistance, Foodbank, probation and parole, hospital, addiction services, mental health services, medical services, Salvation Army services, Veteran's services, and public transportation).

This is the location that will provide opportunities to ensure individuals have the tools needed to get out of homelessness and to contribute to our community!

This is the right location for our community as a whole.

### **The Right Organization**

The Flathead Warming Center knows how to provide safe and effective emergency shelter services and we have experience in doing it right! A large part of our success is because we recognize the importance of being a good neighbor. Many of our policies and procedures are created with our neighbors in mind! We have reached out to the neighbors.

After knocking on doors and also mailing letters to neighbors (beyond the City's requirement of notification), on Thursday, September 17th, we hosted a neighborhood meeting. The neighbors are good people. We look forward to working with our neighbors to continue to address their concerns and consistently earn their respect. Our desire to partner with neighbors does not end with your vote of "Yes". We look forward to being a good neighbor and partnering with the neighborhood to ensure longterm success.



**CITY 000081**

There are several misconceptions of our homeless population. Misconceptions often create concern and fear. We understand this. Where there are hypothetical concerns and fears, we have experience and facts.

**While many left the meeting with answers they needed, here is our response to neighbor concerns:**

- **“What if someone breaks out a window to my business?”** Residential and business owners have rights, remedies, and recourse to protect their property, as in any neighborhood in our community. The presence of the Warming Center does not change anyone’s rights. We have also explained that if a Warming Center guest “burns their bridge” with a neighbor, he or she will lose their shelter services with us. We explain this to our guests as well. We are serious about being a good neighbor.
- **“I don’t want someone to defecate in my yard!”** This has not been our experience at all. In fact, our experience is just the opposite. As individuals feel apart of community and are given the opportunity to participate and give back to community, independently our guests begin to pick up trash in the neighborhood. This has been our experience in our previous neighborhood, which was primarily residential. As we teach our guests how to be a good neighbor, they become protective of the shelter and the neighborhood.
- **“Someone can hide on my property and jump out to attack one of my employees!”** This is a hypothetical concern. The fact is, this has not been our experience at all. Our experience is that the people who come for shelter do not have intent to harm anyone, they are looking to be warm and safe. We understand that perception is everything in homeless services. We will do everything that we can, but it is very important to say, “It is not against the law for a homeless individual to be seen. Homelessness does not equal danger for the community. A homeless individual is far more in danger than the rest of our community. A homeless individual is much more likely be a victim of a crime than to be the perpetrator.
- **“I have a daycare right next door. What about the children?”** As we first considered this location for the Warming Center, we considered the daycare, it’s proximity and times of operation. The fact is, the daycare is over 200 feet away from the north boundary line of our potential property and the potential Warming Center building is even further. The Daycare reports on their Facebook page an opening time at 7:30 a.m. Our guests leave at 7:00 a.m. As we did last year, we plan to have Eagle Transit pick up our guests and transport them out of the neighborhood to the Salvation Army where breakfast is provided. The Daycare is closed over an hour before the Warming Center opens each evening. We also intend to have our guests brought to the Center from Feeding the Flathead dinners. While the daycare is open, the children are supervised at all times with parents accompanying children into and out of the daycare. Children are also supervised on the playground, which is located behind the building, out of sight from the potential Warming Center. We have policies and procedures against loitering. An individual will lose their opportunity for shelter he or she loiters. It is likely that a child will never even see a Warming Center guest, nor be around a guest. Even if a child sees or is around a homeless person, the child is supervised at all times and it would be a stretch that a child would be harmed just by being in the proximity of a homeless individual.
- **“We are concerned about individuals being in the neighborhood when they arrive past curfew, are not allowed to enter, or are asked to leave.”** Our experience tells us that individuals arrive to the Warming Center promptly at the time of opening, seeking immediate warmth. In fact, the majority of guests want to go straight to bed. It is tiring to be in the cold all day. For structure, we have a curfew, however the curfew has not been an issue in the past. Turning an individual away because they did not make curfew did not happen last winter. Only a couple of times an individual was asked to leave the center. The police were called to drive by to ensure that the individual had moved out of the neighborhood. If there is anytime that we believe that an individual is a safety threat to anyone, including the

neighborhood we call the police. Asking someone to leave is not common at all. People understand that they need a warm and safe place. They sincerely do not want to mess things up with poor behavior.

- **“Individuals will come from all over to our neighborhood.”** We are not introducing homelessness to the neighborhood. This is an area of town where homeless individuals are even known to sleep in places not meant for human habitation. Meridian is a major street that our entire community travels through.

**Our experience has been different than many hypotheticals that we often hear.**

**Our facts are:**

- The location of the Flathead Warming Center was in the middle of a residential neighborhood last winter. We had a successful season.
- We do not know of any crime in the surrounding neighborhood that was associated with the Warming Center. We researched it.
- Individuals from the Warming Center were not breaking into neighborhood buildings, or jumping out of the dark to attack anyone.
- We did not have guests scaring children or defecating outside.
- The police were not called because a guest was loitering while the shelter was closed.
- Our Church host wrote a very favorable letter in support of the Warming Center
- We also have a support letter from a neighbor of our previous location.
- Neighbors report feeling safe.

The Warming Center is safe, so much so that I do not hesitate to bring my son. I do not want my son to be afraid of people who on the outside may seem different than we are. Do you know what happened when I first brought my 8 year old son inside? He played Chess with a homeless man! You know what happens when a Christmas tree bulb is placed in the hand of a chronically homeless man? He places it on the tree inside the shelter! Do you know what happens when a group of children come into the center to sing Christmas Carols? The homeless sing along!

As a community we have fears that seem to draw a line between “us” and “them” Our experience is that we are far more alike than we are different!  
Everyone needs a warm and safe place.

The Flathead Warming Center represents the kind of community that we are! We take care of each other in the Flathead!

The Flathead Warming Center asks for your vote of confidence. This location is right for the community as a whole. We ask for you to say YES, knowing that you can trust all that professionals in our community to ensure a longterm success. This is the right time, the right location, and the right organization. **Many in our community count on your vote of confidence!**

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tonya Horn  
Executive Director  
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